

Wrestling Observer Newsletter

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JULY 15, 1991

On Friday, the National Wrestling Alliance, which still exists as an organization even though it actually doesn't promote pro wrestling as an organization anymore, announced that it was still recognizing Flair as world heavyweight champion. Under NWA by-laws, the board of directors control recognition of the championship, and the board voted on Friday to recognize Flair and issued this statement:

The board of directors of the National Wrestling Alliance are aware of the actions of World Championship Wrestling Inc. with regard to the contract dispute between World Championship Wrestling and Ric Flair, and World Championship Wrestling's stripping of the world championship wrestling title from Mr. Flair. The National Wrestling Alliance board wants to make abundantly clear to wrestling fans and the general public that the National Wrestling Alliance continues to recognize "Nature Boy" Ric Flair as the NWA world heavyweight champion.

Bob Trobich, legal counsel for the NWA, who is a partner in Guthrie's law firm which explains this turn of events even more clearly, said that WCW can crown anyone they want as their world champion, but they don't have the authority to strip Flair of the NWA title. "Ever since the Turner organization purchased Jim Crockett Promotions, it has been assumed they purchased the National Wrestling Alliance. That is not true. The Crockett organization was a member of the NWA. World Championship Wrestling is currently a member of the NWA, however under current bylaws, the board of directors controls the recognition of the champion."

What all this means is the members of the NWA board, and I'm really not sure who they consist of anymore but the names bandied about have been Steve Rickard (a promoter out of New Zealand), Don Owen, Carl and Elliot Murnick (former Carolinas-based promoters for Jim Crockett Promotions) and Jim Crockett (who ironically owns a minority interest in WCW), have voted to allow Flair to continue as NWA champion. This really isn't a major factor, except in Japan where the NWA name still holds a lot of weight and the WCW name means very little, since WCW had quit using the NWA name many months back. But Flair can legally work independent shows as NWA world heavyweight champion. He can go to Japan as NWA world champion. Also, since the championship belt itself is the NWA championship belt, there now is no longer any reason for Flair to return it to WCW, although he legally owns the belt as part of a contract settlement with Jim Crockett a few years back with the deal that the company would buy the belt from Flair when it was time for him to give it up. But now WCW would no longer have a claim to be able to buy the actual belt from Flair, if it was even willing to do so in the first place. There has been talk, although really nothing more, of the Murnicks actually opening up a competing promotion to WCW in the Carolinas, called the NWA, with Flair as champion. In addition, for whatever this is worth, NWA by-laws stipulate that a member promotion can't recognize anyone other than the NWA champion as world heavyweight champion (which is why, during the 70s, the WWWF dropped the word "world" in its heavyweight title, because Vince McMahon Sr. and the WWWF was at the time part of the NWA). In other words, on July 15, when either Luger or Windham become WCW world heavyweight champion, then WCW will probably be expelled as a member of this alliance that right now doesn't really even exist. To take this one step further, if we are to assume that the WCW and NWA titles were two separate entities, it means that since Tatsumi Fujinami beat Flair in Tokyo and was recognized in Japan as NWA champion (the title at stake because the WCW title was never mentioned) and Flair in the U.S. and WCW champ, that makes Flair an eight-time champion and not a seven-time champion, although the NWA board never recognized Fujinami's win either.

90s NWA TITLE SITUATION

But the most interesting possibility is that Flair can also go to the WWF as the NWA world champion. If Vince McMahon wanted to promote a Hulk Hogan vs. Ric Flair match, this, from a marketing standpoint, would be the avenue that would draw the most money. Indeed, in speaking with many different people in both offices, most feel the best way to go about a potential Hogan-Flair match is to portray Flair as not being a WWF wrestler, but being an outsider and that the WWF doesn't want the match, but that both men individually want it and it's presented as a one-time deal. If Flair is in the WWF for one year, he'll be considered just another WWF wrestler by that time, and whatever lustre Hogan-Flair may have had, will be long gone before the match ever takes place. But my feeling is that McMahon wouldn't even consider it as an option, because it would force him to acknowledge, even in just one case, that a wrestler had a past somewhere else.

AUGUST 5, 1991

This week's speculation regarding Ric Flair goes something like this. Flair will debut for the WWF on 8/26 at Summer Slam at Madison Square Garden with the NWA title belt and challenge Hulk Hogan to a title vs. title match. This was reported by Jim Ross on the 900 hotline this past weekend, but he specifically said it was only speculation and rumors. This is consistent with several things I've heard over the past few weeks, but any "official" word that Flair is WWF-bound is definitely premature, although it only makes sense to expect it. For Flair to live the way he has gotten used to, it would be difficult to make it working the independent circuit and Japan. Reports that Flair has already signed would be erroneous because he is still under contract to WCW until the end of September and any signing of a new contract before Sept. 1 would be a contract violation. Flair has told independent promoters that he isn't interested in doing indies until September, and has agreed to at least one date that I know of with Joel Goodhart in September as NWA champion provided that he isn't with one of the major promotions before that time. Ross was somewhat critical of Flair claiming to be NWA champion, since the organization doesn't even promote wrestling on a regular basis and really doesn't even exist except in name, and said Flair had often said he would never go to the WWF (even though others close to him have said he's long wanted to wrestle Hulk Hogan, particularly at a Wrestlemania). The consensus of thought is that if Flair were to go to Titan recognized as NWA champion, with the belt, that his match with Hogan would have more box office potential than any match on the short-term horizon. Most also feel that if Flair were to go, sans the belt, that his box office value against Hogan would significantly decrease, but it would still far more successful than Hogan's current program with Sgt. Slaughter has been. But acknowledging the existence of another organization, even one that isn't competition and really doesn't even exist, goes against everything Titan Sports stands for. This is clearly a case of stubbornness vs. maximum box office potential and the decision to be made, given the current climate, will be most interesting. "We Want Flair" chants were heard at most of the WCW events this past week with banners regarding the subject at three of the cards. In addition, on Wednesday night, at an Atlanta Braves vs. Pittsburgh Pirates baseball game, there was a "We Want Flair" chant from the outfield loud enough that it was acknowledged both on the television and radio broadcast of the game and also a "TBS, Bring Back R. Flair" banner that was shown on television.

OCTOBER 4, 1991

In a story that we don't have full details on at press time, Paul E. Dangerously was suspended indefinitely by World Championship Wrestling on Monday morning and missed the WCW television taping on 10/7 at Center Stage in Atlanta.

The suspension, said to be with pay, covers all activities related to the company. Dangerously (Paul Heyman) is under an announcing contract reported to be in the \$125,000 to \$150,000 per year range which expires on April 1, 1992. It was no secret within wrestling that the WCW steering committee wanted to change his role from announcer back to manager (of The Enforcers, and also of Rick Rude if WCW could strike a deal with Rude). Dangerously didn't want the role change unless they were going to make a new financial deal since it involved more traveling and because his contract specifically called for added money for house show dates. However, from all accounts, this suspension had nothing to do with money or changes in the role.

Apparently there was a deal that was struck between WCW and Jerry Jarrett which would have resulted in a title unification match with Lex Luger and Jerry Lawler. The National Wrestling Alliance name was going to be re-introduced as the supposed leading world heavyweight title, but not until the Luger-Lawler match took place. The company was working legally on regaining possession of the old NWA world title belt that Ric Flair has been using on television and apparently, if the belt could be regained legally, which is still very much in question, the Luger-Lawler winner would get the belt. Apparently this was an attempt at a strike back against the World Wrestling Federation, which seemingly had the dream match to settle the so-called real world title situation with the Hulk Hogan-Ric Flair matches that obviously are clearly the focal point of American pro wrestling right now to both WCW and WWF fans. Anyway, the storyline would be something to the effect of Luger challenging all world title claimants. Of course, neither Hogan, Flair, or whomever may wind up holding a title in the WWF would respond. Lawler would be the "only" world champion who would respond and they'd market a match or series of matches to determine what they would call the "real" world title and introduce the NWA name again with the crowning of the championship. The angle to start this scenario was scheduled to be shot at a WCW television taping on 11/11 in Memphis.

Well, over the past few days, WCW postponed the 11/11 television taping in Memphis, and then Jarrett canceled the entire scenario, apparently claiming that word had leaked out in wrestling. As WCW officials were saying Monday night, and friends of Dangerously were confirming, the story given out was that Dangerously told Eddie Gilbert. Somehow this caused Jarrett to feel that too many people knew. Since he was used to all of his angles being secretive since he's from the old school, he backed out on the deal, or at least that is how the story goes. Dangerously was then suspended for the remainder of his contract. As the story goes, Dangerously has maintained not only that he didn't tell Gilbert anything, but that he himself knew nothing of the Lawler-Luger scenario until being told he was the reason the deal fell through, except he did know the date of the already postponed television taping in Memphis. Indeed, until this entire scenario exploded with Dangerously's suspension, virtually nothing having to do with this scenario was known even by the most avid insiders other than some people knowing a Luger-Lawler match was in the works because of a report by Jim Ross on Saturday on the WCW hotline.

OCTOBER 21, 1991

Well, it's time to read about pro wrestling's version of the Thomas hearings.

First witness, Mr. Eddie Gilbert, in an interview on this past Sunday's Pro Wrestling Spotlight radio show:

To say that I'm outraged is just a small way of putting my feelings on WCW, Jim Herd, a man that I had a lot of respect for until this week and looked up to a lot in the business in Jerry Lawler and Jerry Jarrett. I think that the only thing Paul E. Dangerously is guilty of at this point in time is being my friend. I think WCW has taken it out on Paul because

of his friendship with me. Whatever this thing they have toward me, I don't understand. When Cactus Jack and myself were supposed to start up together, and to be very honest it was because of our matches in Philadelphia, everything was fine. Cactus was supposed to be starting back. He was supposed to be getting this big push against Sting. Then all of a sudden, two weeks before I was supposed to start, they called me up, Magnum T.A. called me up and tells me I'll be starting there and I'll be wrestling Brian Pillman at the Clash of Champions in a lightheavyweight title tournament match. I was very happy. A week later, they have their guy Jim Ross call me, to give me this lecture, like General George Patton or something. He told me that I'd be wrestling Ricky Morton. I knew then what they were doing was giving me a job, but tying my hands so I really couldn't do what I do best. Now, the situation has happened, it's no secret that Jerry Lawler and Jerry Jarrett do not care for Paul E. Dangerously. The only thing that I knew was that WCW was going to be doing a television taping in Memphis. I called Jerry Lawler and I was talking to him about my bookings in Memphis and what we were supposed to be doing there. I asked him, "Are you going to be wrestling Lex Luger in Memphis at the WCW taping?" He said, "How do you know this." I said, "Well, I've got sources and I found out." He got all upset and he said, "Well, whoever told you needs to be fired." From that, somehow, it got back that Jerry Jarrett supposedly and allegedly called Jim Herd and called for the firing of Paul E. Dangerously. How Paul E.'s name, from me talking to Lawler, came up between Jerry Jarrett and Jim Herd, the only thing I can think of is that either someone between the time I talked to Jerry Lawler, then Jerry Lawler called Jerry Jarrett all upset saying he didn't want to do the thing now, which I still didn't know what the thing was that they were going to do, myself. I didn't know Jerry Lawler was going to challenge Lex Luger at the WCW taping. I didn't know how they were going to get into it. It was still a secret. Jerry Jarrett then calls up and somehow Paul E. takes the rap for it. All the heat was put on Paul E. Paul E. gets called in without them (WCW) even checking on the story, without them even having proof that Paul E. had done anything wrong, suspended him for talking to Eddie Gilbert. If that had been true, nothing had been done wrong. The only thing I had done was talk to Jerry Lawler and ask him if there's going to be a WCW taping in Memphis. He said, "Yes," got all upset, and called the whole thing off.

I'm really sick of tired of WCW and the things they're doing. If they would put as much energy into the direction their headed, booking their TVs, booking their house shows as they do in picking out small little things like this, they'd be very successful. But they don't do that. They're very personal about things they do. There were very personal feelings involved in the Ric Flair situation when he left there. It doesn't matter what differences I've ever had with Ric Flair personally or professionally. I still respect the man as a wrestler. But they got rid of him over personal feelings between himself and Dusty Rhodes, I feel, and I think that's the popular feeling with everyone, and Jim Herd's feelings toward him. The situation with me throughout the past three years with those people has been very personal. It has not been business. If it had been, I'd have been brought back as a heel and been used the right way. Paul E. Dangerously being suspended was very personal. It was not a business decision. This man has a lot of talent. I don't see how they could even think of sending him home without even checking out the story. When you talk about Jim Ross, I have to watch my steps here. I think that if there was an internal investigation, they need to look at people like him. I think he has used other people as scapegoats. I think that he has gotten out of situations in the past by using other people to take the downfall. He's also cost, I think, in a way, a lot of people's future's there. I talked to Lawler and I wanted to make sure he knew that Jim Ross had it on his Saturday night hotline. I think Jim Ross should be reprimanded as well. Nothing is ever talked about Jim Ross bad. No one ever questions what he does. I think that people should start doing that.

What Jerry Lawler actually did is that he's actually the one who got the whole story out. As this past week has gone by, and I've heard different conflicting reports and stories out of Memphis from different people who have talked to Jerry Lawler is that he wanted from the start to back out of it. I think that eventually he knew he was going to be a beaten man by Lex Luger for a world title. And he wouldn't be, and I've heard these words that came out of there that supposedly, he said, that he wouldn't be the king of anything if he lost to Lex Luger. I also had heard that supposedly Jerry Jarrett may be waiting to see what happens with Jim Herd's job come the first of the year. All of a sudden

this starts making a lot more sense to me. All of a sudden Jerry Lawler is finding a reason to back out of the situation by trying to put it on somebody else's shoulders. Jerry Lawler and Jerry Jarrett don't like Paul E. Dangerously at all. If Jerry Jarrett and Jerry Lawler decided that's who they wanted to take the rap, or if it was someone in the WCW office who decided that they wanted Paul E. to take the rap, it was wrong. It's not business. It's the inner politics of the business. You don't ever hear, and you won't ever hear of something like this happening in the WWF with Vince McMahon. I'm not kissing anyone's rear end here. I'm stating a plain fact. If you read Wade Keller's Torch, Dave Meltzer's Observer, or Steve Beverly's Matwatch, when you read about the WWF you never hear, see or read about internal problems with any of their announcers, any of their assistant bookers, or anyone in their office because it's run the right way. They're all worried about the direction of the company. They're not worried about cutting each other's throat. In the WCW office, everyone there is after each other's throat. In that steering committee now, the reason why that committee won't work now, the reason why it hasn't worked in the past, is because everyone in the committee wants to get ahead of each other. They're not worried about the direction of WCW and they won't ever be worried about it.

I'm very serious about this. The reason Jack Petrik hired Jim Herd wasn't for any other reason but for being his close friend. He was someone he could trust to run a company for him. He'd been the director of a wrestling show before. That was it. That was his only knowledge of the wrestling business. What I'm going to call for because we need to do it now, we can't wait any longer, we need a wrestling person. I don't care if it's Bill Watts. I don't care if it's even Jimmy Crockett. We need a wrestling person running the company. It's like no other business. You can't make any decisions about a wrestling company unless you know wrestling. You can't be swayed because that has happened hundreds of times with Jim Herd. Back in my time in the committee when I was in there, when we would make a decision, we would leave there, then someone would get around Jim Herd and maybe they would take him out for a couple of drinks and have him go back on the decision. He didn't know the decision he was making because he didn't know the wrestling business. To run that company, you need a person at the head of it who knows wrestling who can make the decisions where everyone can respect that person. I don't care who it is, as long as they're a wrestling person. What I'm going to call for is for Jack Petrik at the first of the year when Jim Herd's contract is up to decide if he wants a friend to run that company and watch it go downhill. Or does he want to hire a man, like Bill Watts, or anyone else, to run the company and get it out of the red. And get it back to making money and get people to come out to the matches again. And the boys will be proud of the job they're doing and quit reading all these newsletters where they report the house shows are so bad, and the ratings are bad, and the TV shows are bad. We need something done now. I've sat back on this thing. We've had to go through all the old bookers. They're not looking at the new generation of the business we're in. They don't respect the newsletters. They don't respect the young generation. We need it done now or there isn't going to be a WCW around.

I hadn't talked to Paul E. Dangerously for three or four weeks because of his schedule and my schedule before this situation even happened. I don't want to cause anything bad to happen to him. I think a lot of what happened to him is because of his friendship with me and that's what really puts me on the edge about this situation. It's what's caused me to speak out.

WCW's official public version of the Dangerously story is that he was suspended "for philosophical differences pending a review."

One of Dangerously's legal advisers, Bruce Gold, responded to WCW's official public version of the story with the statement: "WCW has announced it has suspended Paul E. Dangerously. The reason given for this was the existence of philosophical differences. Mr. Dangerously asserts categorically there are neither philosophical nor policy differences with management, employees or agents of WCW and that there are no valid grounds for which WCW can base its unwarranted allegations to break its contractual obligations with Mr. Dangerously. Mr. Dangerously is disturbed that for the second time that WCW is attempting to keep him from doing the job for which he is employed and he's presently conferring with counsel to determine the

appropriate legal response. He is prepared to seek all possible remedies in response to this illegal suspension and damage to his professional reputation and the goodwill associated therewith.

Jerry Jarrett, in an interview on Monday for this coming week's edition of Steve Beverly's Matwatch, stated: "I don't know why he (Gilbert) would make comments such as this on a New York radio program. They are his opinions and he's entitled to it. I don't agree with any of it. There are things attributed to myself and Jerry Lawler and his accounts are equally inaccurate. The facts as presented by Eddie Gilbert are inaccurate. There is a great disparity between his radio interview and what actually transpired. There were conversations with WCW which I feel are inappropriate for me to go into. He's accurate there was a conversation between Eddie Gilbert and Jerry Lawler, but there is a great disparity over what was actually said. There are a number of facets which were discussed between myself and officials of WCW of which I will have no comment."

Lawler, who didn't return a phone call from this publication, was reached by Pro Wrestling Torch in an interview in this week's issue which was filled with contradictions as to whether or not, in his original conversation with Eddie Gilbert on this subject on 10/2, Paul E. Dangerously's name was mentioned by Gilbert. First Lawler stated specifically that Gilbert told him, "I just heard from Paul E. that you're supposed to be wrestling Lex Luger." Lawler later said Gilbert may not have mentioned Dangerously's name specifically, although that is who he assumed Gilbert heard the information from. Lawler also denied any negotiations taking place between himself or Jarrett and WCW. The latter point is undisputedly, not true.

The angle that was going to be would have gone something like this. On the 11/11 taping of WCW, held at the Mid South Coliseum in Memphis, a tournament would be announced in Memphis to determine the NWA world heavyweight champion. The promotion hoped to have legally regained possession of the belt currently in the possession of Ric Flair, which WCW has already filed a legal claim to regain and, according to sources, Flair is willing to sell back to WCW for \$50,200 (the \$25,000 original deposit Flair put on the belt, plus appreciation of the belt and interest on the original investment, etc.). The winner of the tournament, which would be Lawler, would become the new NWA world heavyweight champion. This would set up an NWA vs. WCW match to determine the "true" world heavyweight champion for early next year, to try and steal some of the thunder of the Ric Flair vs. Hulk Hogan Wrestlemania match, which Lex Luger would win.

Judging based on conversations with many insiders on this subject over the past week, my feeling is that it wouldn't be to Lawler's benefit to put Luger over in that situation, given that he would never get the win back. That is probably the best explanation as to why Lawler wouldn't want to do the scenario. But apparently a deal was reached between Jarrett and WCW for the aforementioned scenario. My opinion is that Lawler and/or Jarrett chose using the excuse that word had leaked out (when it really hadn't at all) and therefore, you can't draw any money when word leaks out (a completely ridiculous conclusion based on viewing the wrestling business like it was still 1974 instead of 1991). Consider that every big drawing angle that WWF and WCW has had over the past several years was well known ahead of time to insiders. Most every angle that was a legit surprise hasn't drawn money because an angle that surprises a hardcore fan because it hasn't been hinted at, by the very nature of not hinting, is going to be hard to sell to a casual fan because it's just one big unexpected pop rather than the slow build-up of emotion over a lengthy period of time and subsequent tension being built up and not released which leads to a much bigger release explosion which is the psychology of what draws the most money in an angle).

Lawler reacted to Gilbert knowing about the television taping in Memphis, which, at the time was all Gilbert said he knew about. The question about Lawler vs. Luger came just because, well, anyone with common sense would come to the conclusion that if WCW is going to do a special taping in Memphis with USWA, that a Lawler-Luger match seems to make sense stemming from that. Somehow Dangerously took the blame for telling Gilbert about the angle. According to several sources, Dangerously himself didn't know and in fact couldn't have known about anything other than the fact there would be a television

taping in Memphis on 11/11. Gilbert said he got the information on the date of the taping from a source in WCW other than Dangerously. But someone, and it actually appears several people, from Lawler to Jim Herd, put the blame on Dangerously and he was suspended for the remainder of his contract with WCW which expires on April 1, 1992.

According to several sources, in the meeting last Monday where Dangerously was suspended, Herd also allegedly brought up that he wasn't happy with the announcing job Dangerously had done and made negative comments toward his work, labeling him as nothing more than a self-promoter. There was some heat from a New York station regarding his comments toward certain celebrities in the New York area since part of Dangerously's act on WPIX included routinely insulting political leaders and local celebs, particularly Howard Stern. In the move to WCBS, the station insisted the political jabs and jabs at certain celebrities and ethnic-type remarks be removed from the repertoire, ground rules that had been accepted by Dangerously as shown by his early weeks on WCBS.

Jim Herd has the perfect right to replace Dangerously as an announcer if he was unhappy with his on-air performance, whether anyone else agrees with him or they disagree with him. That is what the position of authority in an entertainment business entails.

From all accounts we've received, this decision did not have to do with Dangerously's work, even though his character, by its very nature, will always have some negative heat associated with it. At first, I had thought maybe this excuse of using him as a scapegoat for this angle falling apart was just a cover reason for Herd being unhappy with his television work, but those who know the situation said it was strictly for the allegations as it related to the angle falling apart. Within the organization there was a great deal of support given to the idea of removing Dangerously as an announcer anyway and making him lead heel manager. This decision, which had pretty well been agreed upon by those in charge of making these decisions but not yet officially discussed with Dangerously, was not so much because of dissatisfaction with his announcing but because it was thought his talents would be best utilized with the company as a manager.

The problem here is that even if Dangerously had told Gilbert about the date of the taping, or even the angle, which not only is there no proof that he did, but there isn't even any evidence of it other than a contradictory story from Lawler, is that an offense worthy of eliminating someone who could and should be a valuable performer? To Lawler it would be, because that is the way the wrestling business is in his eyes because that is the way the wrestling business was and still is to many people. But this is 1991, and the very same day that Dangerously was suspended because his friend, who was an active wrestler, knew the date of a television taping that was only five weeks away (and if WCW knew how to promote, every fan in Memphis should have known the date since it was only five weeks away), Hulk Hogan was quoted in Newsday, the daily newspaper in Long Island that reaches hundreds of thousands of people, casual people who both are and aren't wrestling fans, freely admitting that the outcomes of all pro wrestling matches are predetermined. And you know how much that will affect the wrestling business in 1991, for its biggest star to freely admit that publicly? Probably not at all.

Even more so, how can a suspension be justified in this case without any evidence, other than the knowledge that Gilbert knew the date of the taping and that Gilbert and Dangerously are good friends. At best one could presume, but it is at best an assumption with no evidence at all, that the information came from Dangerously? You should need more evidence that just a presumption to take away someone's job if there is no problem with their performance of their job.

A few comments on Gilbert's statements regarding Jim Herd and Jim Ross. I've stated before I think Jim Herd is the wrong man to be running WCW. This has nothing to do with this scenario, although if I hadn't felt that way previously, this could be evidence to change that opinion. It has everything to do with the success of the company under his reign, even before the Ric Flair negotiations were botched up (If WCW had made the same offer to Flair that it did after they had fired Flair and the belt appeared on WWF television in trying to get him back before they fired him, they almost certainly would have been able to

keep him and have him drop the title which points out the problem with the leadership). But after losing Flair and handing Vince McMahon his Wrestlemania match, Jack Petrik should have made the necessary changes. I have no clue as to whether or not Herd will be retained after his original contract expires in January but the best word I have is that the company isn't looking for a replacement. As for Ross, when it comes to this controversy, I've found no evidence that he's involved or even had any knowledge of the nature of the negotiations. What was said on the 900 hotline was so timid (just that Luger has challenged all other recognized world champions and thus far, only one has accepted, Jerry Lawler) that any reaction to it is based more on being overly paranoid about secrets and not spending time coming up with intriguing scenarios, that whether someone finds out about them or not, would get the fans back to the arenas.

JULY 20, 1992

The complete line-up for the NWA singles tournament, which takes place 8/6 to 8/12 in Japan, was announced on Saturday in Japan. There were three changes in the list of wrestlers here last week in that Big Van Vader, Ron Simmons and David Taylor of England were pulled out and have been replaced by The Barbarian, Jim Neidhart and Terrence Taylor. We pretty much reported that Terrence Taylor would replace Simmons, and word came in during mid-week that Vader was being pulled as well which obviously was because they were putting him over. In the case of Simmons, I would guess WCW pulled him since he wasn't going to win the NWA tournament and they didn't want him doing any jobs at this point since he's being groomed. It makes the tournament look weaker even though Taylor is a better worker than Simmons, but Simmons got a decent push last time he was in Japan and Taylor didn't get much of a push when he was last in Japan. Neidhart's name is interesting because this tournament is exclusively a WCW and New Japan deal. Neidhart's name isn't on any WCW booking sheets so it could be a New Japan deal as opposed to a WCW deal, but why would New Japan want to bring Neidhart in? The last word we had is that WCW was going to push the tournament pretty heavily on television. Either they would prominently air tournament highlights on television right after the tournament, or it has even been discussed to spend a weekend on TBS where they would use most, if not all of the television shows airing tournament matches with matches on both Power Hour and Saturday Night building to the championship match on Main Event as a way to expose the new title to the largest audience and attempt to boost ratings in the process.

On the PPV Sunday night, the NWA belt that Ric Flair held was displayed by Bill Watts who gave the belt to Hiro Matsuda. WCW won possession of the belt in a lawsuit several months back, but ironically after winning possession, had yet to pay Flair for the belt itself. The financial deal, which saw WCW pay Flair a figure reportedly of slightly more than \$28,000, was finally worked out earlier in the week. The fact that the last time Flair's belt appeared on television with a promotion he wasn't working for and that Watts prominently mentioned his name is going to lead to the Flair jumping rumors. Flair's WWF contract doesn't expire until September 5, 1993. Don't think for a moment that Vince McMahon is going to be agreeable to release him from his deal at a time when McMahon has a dearth of main event heels and given the fact that Flair would be a major plus for his opposition. On a similar subject, a companion lawsuit by WCW against Titan Sports for usage of the title belt is expected to be settled sometime this week. WCW was suing Titan for damages caused by using its prized symbol, the NWA belt, on WWF television shows causing the promotion embarrassment within the wrestling community. The sides are close to agreeing to a nominal financial settlement (between \$30,000 and \$40,000 is being discussed) along with a permanent injunction against using the belt or the facsimile belt that Titan made and used for about a week which the courts looked down upon. In other words, Titan is apparently agreeing not to ever use any footage involving that belt in highlights, footage released to the media or in videos.

The tournament opens on 8/6 in Shizuoka with Scott Norton vs. Bam Bam Bigelow, Tony Halme vs. Masa Chono, Barry Windham vs. Keiji Muto and Steve Austin vs. Arn Anderson in the most intriguing first round match-up. On 8/7 in Nagoya it will be Neidhart vs. Kensuke Sasaki, Taylor vs. Hiroshi Hase, Barbarian vs. Shinya Hashimoto and Rick Rude vs. Super Strong Machine. The single-elimination brackets continue with pairings in the same order in that the Norton-Bigelow

winner meets the Halme-Chono winner and on down the line in the quarterfinals on 8/10 at Tokyo Sumo Hall. The eventual semifinals, which would match up the remaining members from the Shizuoka group in one match and the Nagoya group in the other, are 8/11 at Sumo Hall, while the championship match is 8/12 at Sumo Hall. Although the line-up on paper doesn't look that attractive, the event will almost surely sellout all five nights with \$79 ringside. The NWA title has been considered the "real world title" in Japan since the 1950s when Lou Thesz first brought the title in and wrestled Rikidozan and many champions, in particular Harley Race, Dory and Terry Funk became legends in Japan because of the belt. It was also announced on Thursday in Japan, but not in the U.S., that Seiji Sakaguchi is the new President of the National Wrestling Alliance. The last official president would have been Jim Herd or Jack Petrik, who must have resigned in the middle of one of Bill Watts' angles. Paul E. Dangerously won't be making the trip to Japan even though almost his entire group is in the tournament, however Madusa will. All matches in the tournament are one fall 30 minutes, but in reality no time limit in that if time runs out, they re-start the match until there is a finish. I suspect there will be clean finishes in every match. Figure quarterfinals as Norton vs. Chono, Muto vs. Austin, Sasaki vs. Hase and Hashimoto vs. Rude. Looking from there, it looks like either Muto or Chono in the finals against Rude.

SEPTEMBER 13, 1993

A question of semantics and public perception seems to be the main issue that came out of the National Wrestling Alliance convention held on 9/3 in Las Vegas. The convention was the first NWA convention involving largely unaffiliated promoters struggling to rebuild what was once the dominant wrestling organization in the world since the sale of Jim Crockett's wrestling company to Turner Broadcasting in 1988.

While the NWA has continued to exist, largely as a paper organization, in the summer of 1991 its name was largely done away with in pro wrestling circles with the departure of then-champion Ric Flair from WCW to the WWF. From its inception in 1948 through the mid-80s, the NWA was the largest wrestling organization in the world, comprised at one point of 26 different regional promotions, and its champion was the most recognized champ in the world until the WWF's national expansion combined with almost all the regional promotions going out of business all but destroyed the organization, which continued to exist in the late 80s as a euphemism for Jim Crockett Promotions. For the most part, the world title Flair held, for his final reign was generally called WCW champ rather than NWA champ although it was generally considered that the two were one and the same as it was the lineal title descent and same championship belt that the NWA champion had used. The "NWA" name was downplayed and eventually dropped in order for WCW to not have to pay a booking fee to the NWA for the right to use the name. After Flair was fired by then-WCW Executive Vice President Jim Herd, the NWA, which at the time was totally a paper organization, continued to recognize Flair as champion for the next three months until he joined the WWF, at which point no champion existed for approximately one year. When Kip Frey took over from Herd as WCW's Executive Vice President, he and New Japan President Seiji Sakaguchi came up with the plan to revive both the NWA singles and tag team titles with tournaments, one in the United States and the other in Japan, as international titles to be recognized by both New Japan Pro Wrestling and WCW. Both tournaments were held in 1992, although by the time they were held, Frey had been replaced by Bill Watts.

During this past year, Dennis Coraluzzo, an independent promoter of the New Jersey-based WWA, joined the NWA and began making noises about wanting dates on the champion. As the annual convention approached, with long-time member Jim Crockett no longer being affiliated with WCW in any way but a paper contract and well-known to be planning on starting his own promotion as soon as he was legally allowed (upon making the sale in November 1988, Crockett had signed a five-year no compete clause), there was a lot of talk about a nasty fight for control of the name and the title. In the weeks before the

convention, both Tod Gordon (Eastern Championship Wrestling based in Philadelphia) and Jim Cornette (Smoky Mountain Wrestling) applied for membership. The week before the convention, World Champion Wrestling and Keystone Promotions (Gary Juster), both resigned from the group. In addition, the other WCW-affiliated vote, Joe Murnick Inc. (Elliot Murnick) didn't send membership dues, in effect, resigning as well. The fact that WCW was preparing for all this for months was obvious, as at the Disney tapings, for the shows to be held after the 9/19 PPV, when Rick Rude held the belt that signified being NWA champion, he was only referred to as "World heavyweight champion" with the initials NWA no longer being used. Sakaguchi, who was named NWA President at the 1992 Convention, also failed to send membership dues, effectively ending New Japan's involvement. Steve Rickard of New Zealand, Tony Rickard of New Zealand and Larry O'Dea of Australia, all names dating back to the glory days of the NWA's power, retained their membership. New Japan had decided to wash its hands of the NWA back in February when WCW made the decision to go with Barry Windham, who New Japan had no interest in using as a world champion, as the holder of the belt.

The convention itself only consisted of five people, Crockett, Coraluzzo, Steve Rickard (who brought with him voting proxies of Tony Rickard and O'Dea), Bob Trobich, a Charlotte attorney who is the NWA's legal counsel, and Paul Heyman (Paul E. Dangerously), as a representative of Crockett. Most of the discussion concerned the future of the NWA world heavyweight title, the power structure of the new NWA and discussion of approving the applications of Gordon and Cornette. No new President was named, with the power being in the hands of a three-person board of directors consisting of Crockett, Coraluzzo and Rickard. While the tag team title was brought up at one point, the subject was dropped quickly without any real decisions made. Gordon's application was accepted, while Cornette's application was tabled because the members wanted assurance that Cornette's promotion would recognize the NWA champ, since he's in the unique position of managing the current WWF champion. Word we get is that Cornette is going to accept that stipulation so it is expected his application will be approved shortly. It is also believed that a promoter in England will be sending in an application as well.

The biggest concern going into the convention and coming out is the status of the NWA heavyweight title, currently held by Ric Flair, although scheduled to be switched to Rick Rude on 9/19. It is expected that Trobich will be contacting WCW this week with a plan to switch control of the title from WCW to the members of the NWA. While unconfirmed, it is believed this plan suggested by the NWA will be to approve of Flair losing to Rude, provided WCW agrees to allow Rude to lose the title shortly thereafter to a person of the NWA board's choosing on a house show promoted by an NWA promoter. Since, at press time, WCW had not yet even received a proposal, let alone this specific one, what its response will be is unknown. I believe there is a good chance this proposal won't be accepted and WCW will continue to bill Rude or whomever of its choosing as World heavyweight champion without the NWA name. This is made clear by WCW sending a fax to cable operators asking them to not bill the Flair-Rude match on 9/19 as an NWA title match, but instead simply a world heavyweight title match. At this point, this could turn into a bizarre legal battle, since the wrestling public will consider Rude, or whomever he loses it to later, as the NWA world heavyweight champion whether the initials are used on television or not, since the initials had been used on television for that specific title and physical belt going back many years. WCW does own the physical title belt itself, as Sakaguchi, as NWA president authorized the sale of the belt to WCW when Windham became champion. This may speed up the inevitable process of unifying the two title belts in WCW, and simply having the eventual winner, with Dustin Rhodes name being touted the loudest as being groomed for the spot, be referred to as simply WCW champ or undisputed world champ, which fans will accept as also being the "real" NWA champ just as the same situation occurred in 1991 when

the NWA champion legally ceased to be the WCW champion but that issue wasn't made clear on television to wrestling fans so virtually all assumed they were one and the same. The names bandied about the most as far as future NWA champion were Road Warrior Hawk, Terry Funk and Ted DiBiase. A contract, with guarantees and house show percentages, was drawn up which will be offered to whomever is decided upon to be the new champion.

SEPTEMBER 20, 1993

In other news involving the NWA name and group of promoters, despite how it was worded here last week, Jim Cornette and Smoky Mountain Wrestling's application to join the NWA was tabled and doesn't appear to be set for imminent approval. At least some of those at the meeting felt that, as was the case with the old NWA, that promoters involved should recognize the NWA champion as the world heavyweight champion, and believe Cornette managing WWF champion Yokozuna is a conflict with that. From what I'm told, Cornette and SMW's check to join was neither returned nor cashed, and that Cornette will be accepted when his tenure in the WWF is over.

SEPTEMBER 27, 1993

The biggest story that came out of WCW's Fall Brawl PPV, came four days before the show even took place in a Charlotte courthouse. In a series of scenes more reminiscent of a television drama than what would expect real life to be like, the National Wrestling Alliance, Inc., a group of several promoters worldwide, but only one of whom at present even has so much as a television show and none that run a full-time promotion, were attempting to gain a temporary restraining order against WCW to keep them from advertising the Ric Flair vs. Rick Rude match as a world heavyweight title match of any kind. The NWA believed it would, should the match and result take place as scheduled, create the idea among wrestling fans that Rick Rude was the NWA champion since Rude was scheduled to win the belt synonymous with the title and which had up until one week before the event been billed as a match for the NWA championship. On September 1, WCW withdrew as a member of the NWA. The NWA board of directors, which by the NWA by-laws, controls and has the decision-making power over the NWA world heavyweight title, refused to sanction the title change and at their annual convention on 9/3 decided to take control of the championship and create a new champion.

Several of the NWA members were led to believe an out-of-court settlement was reached in principle on 9/14, when WCW led NWA lawyer Ed Lyons to believe they were accepting NWA's proposal that would allow WCW to go through with the Flair-Rude title change provided WCW agrees to have Rude drop the title clean to a wrestler of the NWA's choosing on an NWA house show before January 31, 1994. There were several other provisions as well, which included WCW being forbidden to do anything that would discredit the NWA name or title and would give the NWA the possession of the championship belt. If Rude wouldn't do the clean job to the wrestler of the NWA's choosing, WCW would agree to pay the NWA \$100,000 per day in damages. Early the next morning, the NWA lawyers were told that there might be a problem because WCW was concerned that Rude wouldn't agree to do the job and obviously if that was the case, the price for that in daily penalties was way too steep. The counter-offer was made that the Flair-Rude match would be billed as being for the "World heavyweight title" and the result of the match would go as planned, but that on the broadcast the announcers would read a disclaimer that this match wasn't an NWA world heavyweight title match and that the National Wrestling Alliance did not sanction this event as a title match, which apparently the NWA was still willing to accept.

Later that morning, WCW pulled out from negotiating a settlement and announced it had hired Faison Hicks to represent them in the court case for the temporary restraining order scheduled for that afternoon. Hicks had represented both the NWA and WCW in a 1991 case it won against Vince McMahon and the WWF belt over the NWA belt which resulted in the judge ruling that Ric Flair could no longer wear either the NWA belt or the facsimile NWA belt (when McMahon ordered a duplicate replica belt created for Flair when it was believed Flair would

have to return the belt to the NWA/WCW). In the aftermath of that case, Flair was paid \$28,000 by WCW for his NWA title belt, which Kip Frey and Seiji Sakaguchi agreed to use to revive the NWA title as a recognized championship with a tournament in August, 1992 in Tokyo, won by Masa Chono. In September of 1992, the NWA, which at the time really consisted of two promotions, WCW and New Japan Pro Wrestling although several other former promoters had kept their memberships active, held its convention. At the convention Sakaguchi was named as NWA President. On or around October of 1992, Bill Watts, who replaced Frey as WCW Vice President in charge of Wrestling Operations, drafted a letter, which was believed by NWA counsel to have been a bill of sale for the physical championship belt from the NWA to WCW for the \$28,000 already paid by WCW, representing the NWA, to Flair, which was signed by Sakaguchi as NWA President. Apparently nobody from the NWA actually saw that letter or knew of its contents other than it was known about a bill of sale letter for what had become known in the industry as the "Ric Flair championship belt" to WCW. What wasn't known was that letter, written by Watts and signed by Sakaguchi also gave WCW all "intellectual rights" to use the name NWA. The NWA's counsel was first informed of the contents of the letter during its arguments Wednesday afternoon before U.S. District Judge Richard Voorhees for the restraining order against the match billed as a world title match. The letter was the key in the judge turning down the NWA's claim and allowing the match, advertising of it as a world title match, and the scheduled result, to all go on as planned. The only thing Voorhees ruled is that WCW would be prohibited from calling the match on the PPV show as an NWA title match, which WCW wasn't going to do at this point anyway. The NWA members were scheduled to be discussing the situation later this week as to whether they will challenge the validity of the letter in court, since NWA attorneys claim that NWA bylaws specifically state any such transaction and the belt itself is controlled by the Board of Directors, which were never informed about nor approved the letter. However, with the exception of gaining possession of the "Ric Flair belt," it is not known what can be gained. The title switch to Rude for what all wrestling fans will believe is the NWA championship did take place on 9/19 in Houston, although the initials NWA were never used on the broadcast, but to virtually all wrestling fans watching the show, they believed they were watching an NWA title match and that they had seen the NWA title change. On the air, it was simply referred to as "The World heavyweight championship" and presented as if it were the premier title in the promotion since Vader's title was called just "WCW title" and downplayed heavily. The result can't be erased in the minds of wrestling fans who saw the match or eventually will hear or read of the result by virtue of wrestling publications and wrestling television shows even if an expensive court fight would wind up with the letter being overturned. The NWA can and will likely at some point name a new world champion, but that title in its initial stages would lack the credibility to fans it would have if the champion won it from Rude or whomever, and that in-ring title switch isn't going to take place.

The Charlotte Business Journal in an issue that came out prior to the PPV show had an article about the legal fight between NWA and WCW over the Flair-Rude title match. The story revealed the result of the Flair-Rude match with Rude winning and talked about the television that had been done months back with Rude holding the belt and talking about his win over Flair.

At least some NWA members were also upset at information from its convention in regard to Road Warrior Hawk, Terry Funk and Ted DiBiase being the three discussed as being recognized as next NWA champion that was reported both here and in Pro Wrestling Torch. As was expected by many when those names went public, WCW re-opened negotiations with both Hawk and DiBiase during the week, which some within the NWA believe is largely based on knowledge they were being considered to be NWA champion.

AUGUST 14, 1994

The NWA tournament on 8/27 in Philadelphia will include probably three outsiders plus the regular ECW crew. No names confirmed although several have mentioned Dean Malenko's name.

AUGUST 22, 1994

The name National Wrestling Alliance, a decade after its fall from being the most prominent and dominant wrestling organization in the world, is back alive and in the middle of controversy. Well, the organization doesn't look alive, but the name is back.

The latest controversy around the NWA name and world championship belts stems from a tournament Tod Gordon of Eastern Championship Wrestling is promoting on 8/27 in Philadelphia at the ECW Arena. Gordon announced at his 7/16 house show in Philadelphia that he would be promoting an NWA world heavyweight title tournament, and originally announced it for Woodbridge, NJ but after much complaining from his loyal Philadelphia fans, switched it to the ECW Arena.

However, the NWA, at this point, doesn't approve. The NWA name, founded by several Midwestern wrestling promoters in 1948, quickly on the back of champion Lou Thesz and President Sam Muchnick became the most recognized wrestling championship in the world. The NWA world heavyweight title has remained in existence largely in name only since the WCW/NWA first split-up in 1991 over Jim Herd stripping Ric Flair of the title making it the first title change that didn't take place in the ring since Orville Brown forfeited the title to Lou Thesz after a career ending auto accident in 1949, and second split in 1993.

The main thing that kept the organization of dozens of backstabbing wrestling promoters and promotions on several continents together until being destroyed from both the outside (by Vince McMahon) and from within (both by Jim Crockett's monopolizing the title in his quest to fight McMahon and by the membership at large being unable to work together and falling apart at the seams) in the late 1980s, was the world heavyweight championship, a belt so important that its holder was generally the top drawing wrestler and biggest money maker in the world during most of that period.

That title belt could be traced from the first champion, Brown, who forfeited the title to Thesz, who already held the much-recognized National Wrestling Association version of the title. In gaining power throughout the world, Thesz and Muchnick proceeded to gobble up regional versions of the title in numerous parts of the country although neither were totally successful in their goal of pro wrestling having just one recognized world heavyweight champion and the NWA completely controlling wrestling.

None of that matters today except the name still exists in a legal fashion. The last champion, and last controversy took place about one year ago. At the time, the NWA champion, one of two so-called world title belts recognized by WCW, was Ric Flair, who was scheduled to lose the title to Rick Rude at the Beach Blast PPV. NWA bylaws stipulate that the title can only change hands when given approval from the NWA board of governors, which didn't want to go long with WCW's wishes in approving the change. A court fight ensued prior to the Flair-Rude match, with the NWA asking in order to approve the switch to Rude, wanting the right to bring Rude in on another member promoter's show and lose the NWA title and belt to a wrestler of their choice, since the member promoters wanted the right to book Flair, who they perceived as a better draw, as champion to work their cards as would be their right under NWA bylaws. Ultimately, WCW prevailed in a court fight with the NWA so Rude didn't have to drop the title to a wrestler of the NWA board's choosing in the ring. When Seiji Sakaguchi was President of the NWA, after New Japan decided not to use or recognize the NWA belt after Keiji Muto lost the title to Barry Windham in early 1993 because of problems it was having working with WCW at the time, he signed over the rights to the title and belt to WCW, something unknown even to the NWA's own lawyer, Bob Trobich, which they didn't find out until they were in court. WCW ultimately dropped the NWA name from Rude's championship belt, and for a week, even dropped recognition of the belt before re-naming it the International world belt and dropping the NWA name.

Soon thereafter, Trobich attempted to remake the NWA and at a five-person convention in Las Vegas, created a new board, which would have control of the championship, made up of Steve Rickard of New

Zealand, Dennis Coraluzzo and Crockett. At the time the only one of the three actually promoting was Coraluzzo, on a small-time basis mainly in New Jersey. Crockett has since promoted several shows this year and is attempting to put together a promotion in the Southeast. Gordon later joined the NWA but wasn't made a member of the board. An attempt by Jim Cornette to join was tabled because Crockett (who ironically today is working with Cornette) and Rickard felt it would be inappropriate for the manager of the WWF champion to be a member of the NWA since part of its bylaws had always been that its members would recognize no other wrestler as world heavyweight champion except the NWA champion.

Sound confusing and irrelevant to today's wrestling? It gets better. Gordon, working with Crockett's blessing and in fact claiming Crockett himself requested it, decided to run a tournament to create an NWA world heavyweight champion, reviving the title once again. Gordon said he was under the impression it was approval given by the board when Crockett made the suggestion to him. Others claim Gordon never sought out approval from the NWA board which controls the title before making the announcement. Either way, NWA sources tell us as of press time, Gordon doesn't have approval to create an NWA heavyweight champion. After making the announcement, Gordon did attempt to make contact with Coraluzzo, both of whom consider the other as rivals because of the close proximity in which each runs indie shows. The approval of Coraluzzo and Crockett would give Gordon the majority needed to approve his tournament and his champion.

As of press time, Coraluzzo was against giving the tournament approval, but was willing to give in provided a contract is drawn up giving the other promoters dates on the champion, putting it in writing that the champion would agree to lose the belt in the middle of the ring when the board decides to make a change, and also wanting a voice in who would be made champion as his position on the so-called board gives him the power to do. As it stands, the tournament winner seems to be in the hands of Gordon and booker Paul E. Dangerously, although Crockett apparently has had input. Whomever the decision has been made to give it to right now, and there is someone picked, isn't of Coraluzzo's choosing. Rickard stated he wanted the matter discussed at the NWA convention, planned for mid-September, before he'd approve anything, which was Coraluzzo's back-up position. Crockett was unavailable to be reached at press time but those close to the situation believe he still wants Gordon to hold a tournament now and crown a champion although nobody could say they knew for sure, and that Crockett wanted the tournament winner to then come down either late this year or early next year to a Crockett show in his proposed new territory and drop the strap, which Crockett would then gain control of, like he had control of it for most of the 1980s when Ric Flair held the title. Of course the other NWA members are against one promoter holding complete control of the title. Gordon is still planning the tournament, which by the bylaws, without either Rickard or Coraluzzo's permission, he should have no right to do. Gordon claimed he's now getting the feeling he's being set-up, but that he's not going to be a party in what he called gamesmanship going around and said that he hasn't heard anything negative from anyone either representing the NWA or on the NWA board. He said he's going to run the tournament and crown a champion no matter what, and said that champion will be made available to Crockett or any other NWA promoter that wants dates on him. He's claiming a precedent was set a few weeks back when Crockett crowned his own NWA women's champ and then changed the title as well without either seeking approval of the board or informing any of the other member promoters of his plans. For whatever this is worth, based on the past, the NWA men's world heavyweight belt has been the only one under those restrictions because it was the one that was the key to the organization whereas so-called tag champs, women's champs, and lighter weight champs were always regional belts not defended on a worldwide basis. In fact, the middleweight and light heavyweight titles (which are still around with EMLL in Mexico) using the NWA name have remained in existence, probably without the knowledge of whatever else consisted of the NWA. Gordon also noted that he's the only NWA affiliated promoter that has a television show that is currently airing.

So even if Gordon doesn't get approval before tournament time, he's already said he's going to run the tournament and use the name anyway.

A ten-man single elimination tournament is at press time scheduled to include Shane Douglas, Too Cold Scorpio, Tazmaniac, 911, Dean Malenko, Chris Benoit, Osamu Nishimura and three others to be announced, one of whom negotiations are going on to be Road Warrior Hawk but he wasn't officially confirmed at press time.

The NWA legally could attempt to get a restraining order against the tournament and it is a trademarked name. Gordon appears to be banking that this won't happen, and he's probably correct. The NWA board already owes \$5,000 in legal fees from its losing case last year with WCW that it hasn't paid, and nobody seems to want to ante up the money to keep control of the name. By allowing the tournament to continue without approval and without a legal fight, the board is giving up its power over the name, and hence, years after it was the dominant name in wrestling, and after it truly no longer existed, the final burial of the NWA world heavyweight championship as it once existed, is scheduled to take place at the tournament billed to be its resurrection.

AUGUST 29, 1994

The tournament to recreate a National Wrestling Alliance world heavyweight champion scheduled for 8/27 in Philadelphia at the ECW Arena seems at press time to have been given official NWA sanction.

After a week of haggling back-and-forth, it appeared the tournament would go on despite not being approved by the NWA board which hold the decision-making power for the dormant title and dormant organization. According to ECW promoter Tod Gordon, on 8/22, he had reached an agreement with Dennis Coraluzzo, who would appear at his show, which, along with Jim Crockett, would give him the two necessary votes out of the three board members to sanction the tournament to recreate the championship with the most wrestling history behind it. While Jim Crockett isn't expected at his show, earlier in the week Crockett had made it apparent that he was supporting Gordon's tournament. Coraluzzo's support apparently came from a discussion with NWA legal adviser Bob Trobich who told him that the public haggling and articles in last week's Observer and Torch made the organization look bad and they should be united in regard to the tournament. The more pragmatic idea is that since they weren't financially prepared to go to court to enforce their power over the name if they wanted to block things, Gordon was going to do the tournament anyway so they might as well go along with it.

It had appeared for most of the week that Coraluzzo and the remaining board member, Steve Rickard of New Zealand, were against Gordon holding the tournament. Rickard wanted to wait until after the NWA convention, scheduled for 9/15 in Atlantic City, before agreeing to a new champion although reportedly after the situation was reported last week, he was for creating a champion and going along with the tournament because of the feeling the publicity made the organization look bad. Coraluzzo, who has been pushing to get SMW, AAA and IWC to join to make it an internationally credible organization, was pushing for a different wrestler, Chris Benoit, to win the tournament than Gordon had picked and Crockett wanted. As of Friday, it appeared the sides had reached an impasse largely over the issue of who would win the tournament. In addition, there was a disagreement because Coraluzzo wanted promoters using the champion to have to give the champion a \$500 per appearance guarantee to give the title prestige and make sure larger groups wouldn't be able to as easily sign away the champion. He also wanted a contract giving all member promoters rights to use the champion and making sure the board was legally protected in the instance the champion refused to lose the title when requested. Reportedly there was a verbal promise made that would be put into writing this week before the tournament that the eventual winner would drop the title to Benoit, although Gordon's booker, Paul Heyman reportedly told Coraluzzo on 8/22 they'd "steal" Benoit as they had Sabu and Terry Funk, whom Coraluzzo had been using and don't work dates in the area for him anymore.

Crockett on Friday attempted to convince Coraluzzo to agree to Gordon's choice in the tournament rather than Benoit, making a scary statement that he had never even heard of Benoit, and that how could Coraluzzo know if the guy had the work ethic necessary to be champion. While Benoit is not a star in the United States and is lacking in some aspects such as facial expressions and interview ability, his

work ethic is far beyond question. The idea that Crockett could claim to have never heard of him or have no knowledge of his work ethic shows at best analysis for Crockett to be a liar, which is more likely not the case. At worst, which unfortunately is the more likely alternative, that statement shows just how out of touch Crockett has become to the business and the wrestling talent of today which is scary for someone who is trying to open a new territory and compete in an exceedingly difficult business in the year 1994. We don't know at press time how that impasse was broken although imagine it will become obvious at the show.

The single elimination tournament bracketing at press time was set for a Shane Douglas vs. Tazmaniac, Dean Malenko vs. Osamu Nishimura, Benoit vs. Too Cold Scorpio and 911 vs. an as yet unnamed opponent in the first round with the winners of the first two matches and second two matches meeting in the semifinals.

SEPTEMBER 4, 1994

In what will go down as one of the more public double-crosses in a business known for lying and double-crossing, Tod Gordon's Eastern Championship Wrestling after holding the NWA tournament on 8/27 at the ECW Arena in Philadelphia, publicly trashed the belt and the promotion on its television show three nights later announced it was quitting the fledgling organization.

The plan to have ECW champion Shane Douglas win the tournament, then say the belt was worthless and throw it on the ground, was several weeks in the making and had a dual purpose. It was both a way to giving Douglas credibility as more than a local champion as ECW changed its name from being Eastern Championship Wrestling to Extreme Championship Wrestling and Douglas' championship of the promotion will now be called "ECW World heavyweight champion" and attempts to expand outside the Philadelphia area; and to publicly double-cross the NWA, particularly Dennis Coraluzzo and possibly Jim Crockett, and give the group the renegade promotion reputation it is building on. With the in-your-face mindset of its ECW arena core audience, when Douglas said how the NWA title had meant nothing in seven years, that the organization was dead and belt was worthless and the only belt that meant anything to him was the ECW belt, saying he would never want a championship that Ric Flair held, it got over surprisingly well. There were even chants of "Flair is dead" as Douglas made his speech. Douglas did the speech while a stunned Coraluzzo looked on. Even after the double-cross, ECW officials, Paul E. Dangerously in particular, tried to placate Coraluzzo telling him it was only an angle to get heat on Douglas, but that turned out to be just another in a string of lies when the reality was obvious on television three nights later that it was a public statement which did get over with the ECW core audience, which heavily booted Coraluzzo from the moment he came into the ring as an NWA rep.

During the week, Gordon had received approval from the NWA board by getting Coraluzzo's swing vote by promising that Douglas would lose the title to Chris Benoit, which both Coraluzzo and NWA attorney Bob Trobich were in favor of making the champion. That's just another agreement that won't be lived up to. ECW created its bracketing so that Benoit, who it appeared the NWA would make champion later in the year if the organization ever gets past being a paper organization stage, would lose in the tournament's first round to Too Cold Scorpio. Coraluzzo felt that didn't matter that Benoit lost in the first round since it he felt Benoit showed himself to be the best wrestler in the tournament, a view shared by most who called in who said the Benoit-Scorpio match (rated at ***1/4) stole what everyone said was an overall great wrestling show.

Douglas defeated Scorpio in the tournament finals in about 12:00 of a ***1/4 match when Scorpio missed a splash off the top rope and Douglas pinned him with a belly-to-belly. As Coraluzzo presented the new NWA title belt, Douglas started a long speech talking about the history of the title and names like Lou Thesz, Buddy Rogers and The Funks. But as the speech went on, he came to the name Flair and said how the belt was part of the past and that he didn't want to resurrect something that was dead. He said ECW was leaving the past behind and that he didn't want a belt that hasn't meant s--- in seven years.

Before going to the ring, Coraluzzo got Douglas to sign a contract as NWA champion which stipulated that he agreed to drop the title when it was requested by a majority vote of the NWA board, via either pinfall or submission. The contract stipulated a \$500 per appearance guarantee for any title defense, plus air transportation and hotel whenever he's booked more than 200 miles from his hometown (Pittsburgh in this case). The contract stipulated that any NWA promoters requesting dates on him must give him 45 days notice. If Douglas doesn't abide by the contract, as he apparently won't be doing, then the NWA can strip him of the title. There is no word on the reaction of the rest of the NWA board, although Coraluzzo himself wants to hold a tournament to crown Benoit in November.

Although both Coraluzzo and Trobich were mad, more at Gordon than Paul E. Dangerously, who no doubt masterminded most if not all of what happened, Crockett, according to those who have spoken with him since the incident, seemed unconcerned about it. Trobich, who didn't find out about what happened until 8/30, was heavily critical of Gordon saying he didn't deal with them in good faith, although said he really didn't see it as being significant because the only people he said who would know about it are the 850 fans in the building and those who read about it in the Observer and Torch. "In wrestling you learn who you can trust and who you can't," he said. There are a lot more people on one list than the other." He said he was disappointed because in his phone conversations with Gordon he thought he was a straight-shooter and he felt they had a very cordial relationship, and Trobich went to bat for Gordon telling Coraluzzo and Steve Rickard (the other NWA board member) it was a good idea to support the tournament.

The tournament opened with Dean Malenko making Osamu Nishimura submit to the boston crab in a **1/4 match; 911 then choke slammed mystery opponent Doink the Clown (Matt Osborne) four times and pinned him in less than 1:00 (1/4*) which popped the full house of 850 since things like wrestlers dressed up as clowns are one of the reasons that audience has rejected WWF and WCW. Douglas pinned Tazmaniac (***) and Scorpio pinned Benoit (****1/4). Second round saw Douglas pin Malenko (**3/4) and Scorpio beat 911 via count out (*). In the latter, Doink came out and attacked 911's manager Paul E. Dangerously. However Doink unmasked, revealing Douglas. At this point, Osborne, who will be billed under his wrestling name Matt Borne, came out with a little bit of clown make-up on but out of the get-up and hit 911 with a chair to cause him to lose.

The only non-tournament match saw Cactus Jack & Mikey Whippreck win the ECW tag titles beating Public Enemy. Whippreck replaced Terry Funk who called earlier in the day saying he missed his flight out. Funk & Jack were scheduled to win the belts and start a three-month long program. It was announced that Funk wouldn't be there and refunds were offered at the start of the show. Jack dragged Whippreck, the perennial loser who somehow always wins, out as his partner. Rocko Rock (Ted Petty) was on the top rope ready to jump on Whippreck when a nearly KO'd Jack collapsed and hit the ropes, causing Rock to crotch himself and fall into the ring and Whippreck got the arm over his chest for the upset win (****1/2). At press time it isn't known if Funk will be returning to ECW.

SEPTEMBER 26, 1994

Dennis Coraluzzo has planned NWA board meetings on 11/18 and 11/19 and is planning the NWA heavyweight tournament for 11/19 in Cherry Hill, NJ in conjunction with Tommy Fierro. He's running a four-date swing with shows 11/16 in Seaside Heights, NJ, 11/17 in Philadelphia and 11/18 in Pleasantville, NJ. Among the names involved in the tour are Jerry Lawler, Al Snow, Too Cold Scorpio, Rock & Roll Express, Gangstas, Dirty White Boy and Chris Candido. It appears the plan to make Chris Benoit the champ may fall through because Benoit will be booked with New Japan during their junior heavyweight tournament that week so I suspect that makes Candido the favorite. He's trying to bring in AAA wrestlers, but all their big guns will be in Japan that week. Don't be surprised to see Jim Crockett not agree to go along with Coraluzzo on this, although in a strange bit of

irony, Howard Brody, who is promoting the ECW Tampa show on 9/23, joined the NWA this past week.

OCTOBER 17, 1994

Dennis Coraluzzo's NWA tournament on 11/19 in Cherry Hill, NJ will have Dirty White Boy, Chris Candido, Tracy Smothers, Johnny Gunn, Jerry Lawler, Devon Storm, Al Snow and one more wrestler, likely Scotty Flamingo. He's also bringing in Rock & Roll Express vs. Gangstas and Jim Cornette vs. ref Mark Curtis on the show.

OCTOBER 24, 1994

The Dennis Coraluzzo NWA shows are now being billed as SMW shows on 11/17 in South Philadelphia at Stanton Hall, which is pretty close to the ECW Arena, 11/18 in Pleasantville, NJ and 11/19 in Cherry Hill, NJ for the NWA tournament. Eddie Gilbert is the final name in the tournament.

NOVEMBER 28, 1994

The long-talked about Philadelphia area wrestling war between Tod Gordon's ECW and Dennis Coraluzzo's NWA took place on 11/19 with both groups coming off with successful shows.

Coraluzzo announced an NWA tournament for Cherry Hill several months ago after Gordon and booker Paul E. Dangerously swerved him and the NWA board by holding a tournament and then having Shane Douglas win, and having Douglas reject the title saying the ECW title was the only title worth anything. It started a war of words between the sides that in some ways has reached silly proportions because they are fighting over nothing, but it does give the ECW hardcore fans another enemy promotion (as if they don't have enough already).

By most accounts, the 11/19 ECW show, which drew its largest crowd to date with 1,100 shoe-horned into the 850-seat building, was one of their best shows in a string of hot cards. The Steve Austin injury, which due to the timing of it and the hatred between most in WCW with ECW, caused an awful lot of skepticism within ECW, particularly when WCW tried to send Meng to ECW to take his place the day before the show. The only reason WCW was cooperating with ECW for this and only this show, sending Pillman, Sherri and Kevin Sullivan, was because it was an out of court settlement for WCW using the name "When Worlds Collide." The sides reached a compromise with Brian Pillman, who Dangerously had wanted from the start more than anyone in WCW except Austin and WCW had refused to allow him to use. Pillman & Douglas, managed by Sherri Martel, lost to Ron Simmons & Too Cold Scorpio in the main event when Simmons pinned Douglas after Sherri accidentally hit Douglas with her shoe. After the match Pillman took the sweater Sherri was wearing off and underneath she was wearing a Ric Flair t-shirt and Douglas after the match piledrove Sherri and called her a slut and made all his Ric Flair remarks.

Across the river in Cherry Hill, NJ, the NWA heavyweight tournament drew 625 fans with Chris Candido winning by pinning Tracy Smothers after hitting him in the head with a chain as Smothers went for a back suplex. Most reports are it was also a strong show, largely revolving around SMW talent, with only three weak matches out of 11. Security guards were wearing "ECW sux" t-shirts at this show, while at the ECW show, in the opener they had Steve Richards & J.T. Smith vs. Chad Austin & Hack Myers. Austin grabbed the house mic and said after the match he was going across the river to see some real wrestling so the other three all jumped him and beat him up. Nothing against Candido's work since he's one of the best new wrestlers in the business and will probably be among the elite workers in the United States within a short period of time, but having him as NWA champion at this point in time pretty well kills the title as far as being recognized anywhere as a legit world title. First off, his main job is working for SMW and unless they join the NWA and recognize Candido as champion, you'll have a world champion who isn't even recognized as such within his own promotion. Candido isn't a national name like even a Terry Funk who at least could be booked most weekends on indies and at least give the

impression he's a traveling champion to give the belt some credibility. Of the guys in the tournament, he was probably as good a choice as any, (Jerry Lawler has the national name but obviously wouldn't be a good choice as NWA champion right now) but the problem is they didn't have a current-day world champion reputation calibre wrestler in the field. Jim Crockett, who was not at the show but still calls his promotion NWA, won't recognize this title and there is talk he'll create his own title, although legally he won't have the right to call it NWA world heavyweight champion since the majority vote of the board picked Candido and the NWA title is a legally registered title controlled in the bylaws by the board.

DECEMBER 5, 1994

At the NWA meetings, Steve Rickard was named Chairman of the NWA and Dennis Coraluzzo and Howard Brody were put on the Board of Directors, although until a major wrestling company joins with them, this is just a paper organization.

FEBRUARY 13, 1995

WWF wasn't the only group canceling its weekend schedule.

In one of those supposed to be's that didn't happen, the erstwhile NWA world heavyweight title was scheduled to change hands on 2/4 in Shenandoah, PA and the new champion was scheduled to be Dan Severn on a show canceled because off bad weather.

With Chris Candido, who holds the title which is recognized but never defended in his home SMW territory, leaving for Titan starting the first of March and thus unavailable, they had set up the title match and change for this past weekend and for whatever reason, never even advertised Severn as his opponent.

The idea of going with Severn as champion appears to be because by bringing the belt into the octagon at the next UFC, that it'll give the title tremendous exposure since UFC PPV shows draw so well and perhaps it'll afford some local promotional opportunities if he does well again at the show. Theoretically, the next UFC PPV show if growth continues as it has, may trail only the biggest WWF shows when it comes to PPV audience in 1995. In addition, based on his performance at the last show, Severn had to be considered something of a favorite to win the tournament and eventually get another match with Royce Gracie where, based on the previous match, he has to be considered as having at least some chance of winning. However, even though Severn made something of a name for himself among Japanese wrestling fans and among the UFC audience, of which maybe one-third crosses over into having any pro wrestling interest, aside from that group, he has no name value when it comes to American pro wrestling fans. At the indie shows he's done since UFC, his recognition has been way up but the idea that he would draw UFC fans to independent pro wrestling shows hasn't turned out to be the case.

Anyway, where this all goes from here is anyone's guess. I suspect things will go as planned, although when this will all happen hasn't been finalized.

FEBRUARY 20, 1995

Supposedly Jim Crockett, who wants nothing to do with the current NWA, failed to pay his organizational dues and the current NWA wants him to stop billing his Texas shows as NWA. We were told they've even sent him a cease and desist order.

MARCH 6, 1995

Apparently Jim Crockett is now in good graces with the NWA once again although I hear conflicting stories. Crockett felt making Chris Candido champion wasn't in the best interest of the organization.

Crockett has "WWF Superstar Virgil" debuting on 2/25 against Dick Murdoch.